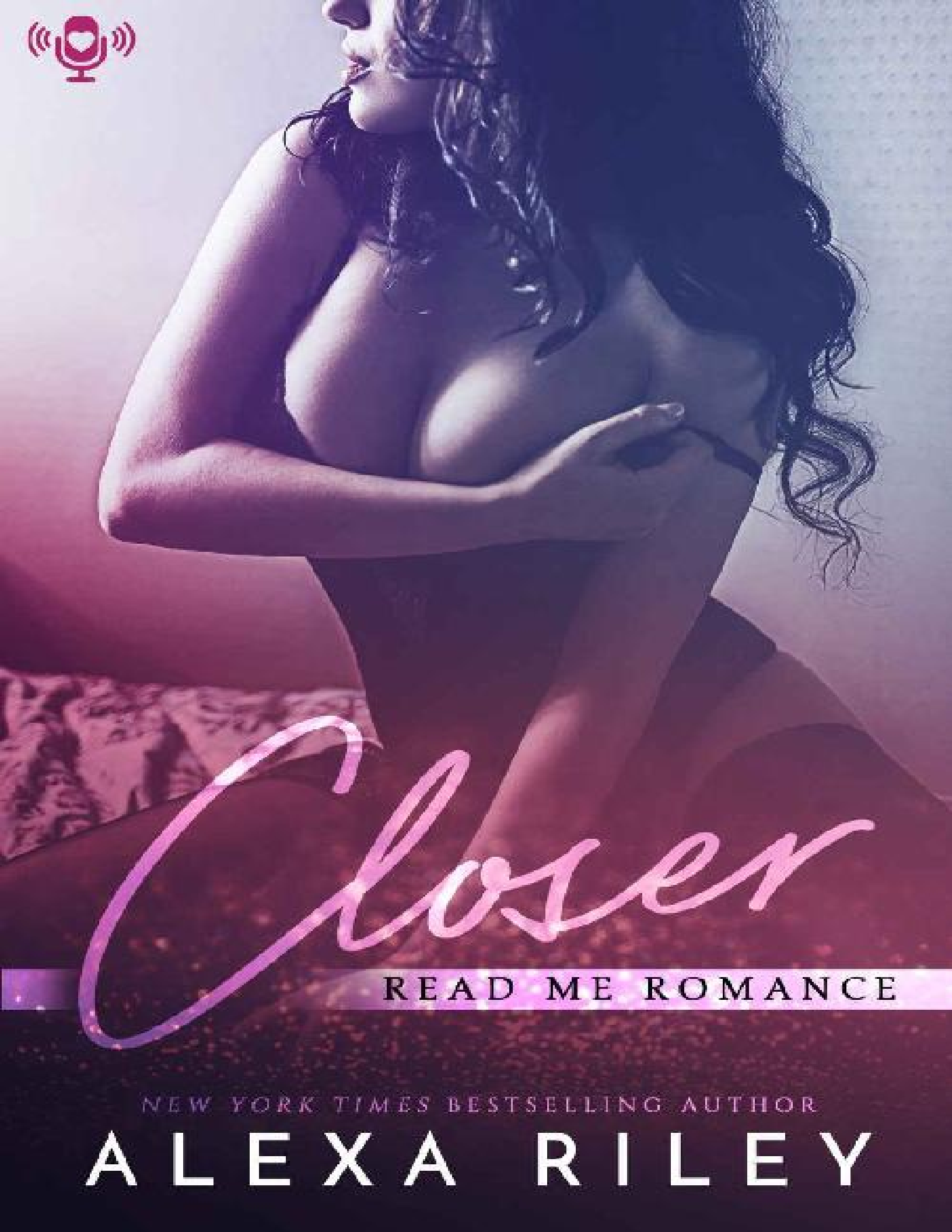




Closer

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CLOSER

BY ALEXA RILEY

Ava fudged a little on her résumé to land her dream job. She's been working her curvy booty overtime to get her boss's new lingerie line off the ground. But when her boss's brother comes in and says Ava should be the face—and body—of the campaign, she's having second thoughts.

Lucas knows what he wants, and the second he sees every lush inch of Ava all bets are off. She's not only the one for the job but the one for him, and he'll do whatever it takes to make her see it.

Warning: This obsessed hero doesn't hold back, and we were more than happy to let him take the reins. Find out what happens when the thick girl gets the alpha and things really heat up!

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Edited by [Aquila Editing](#)

Cover Designer: [Mayhem Cover Creations](#)

To Tessa Bailey... this is all your fault.

ONE

AVA

I stand in front of the bathroom mirror trying to tame my wild mess of dark brown curls. Normally I love my curls, but today they're driving me insane and can't be controlled. I glance down at my phone and know I don't have time to take a shower and start over with them.

"Of all the days," I say to myself as I shake my head.

Of course, the day Rebecca's brother Lucas is coming into the office is when I have the worst hair day of my life. Not that it really matters. He's not even going to notice me. Though he's all I notice. Or have noticed since I started working for Rebecca a little over a year ago. I'm her *right hand everything* as she likes to call me. If she needs something handled, I do it and make sure it's done to perfection. I'm lucky to have gotten this job to begin with. Not to mention I might have lied a touch on my application. I said I had more experience than I really did, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

I was fresh out of college and needed a job badly. I was going from a dorm room to the streets if I didn't come up with a job that could afford me a roof over my head. So I was always trying to prove myself because I still feel guilty about those white lies I laced my application with.

Before I'd even gone on the job interview for Rebecca Caldwell. I researched the heck out of the lingerie company she launched. That's when I first saw Lucas Caldwell, her brother and silent investing partner. It had only been pictures online, but for the first time in my life a spark lit inside of me for the opposite sex. I'd thought maybe something was broken in me before then. I never had much of an attraction to boys. Though Lucas definitely isn't a boy. From the pictures I saw, he's all man. Heck, I'm not even sure *man* is

a good enough word to describe him. He's a god.

Not to mention he's one of the most powerful and richest men in the city. His picture alone sends my heart racing. My crush on him has taken hold and grown bigger over the last year. I've seen first-hand the small things he does for his sister all the time. And her affection for him is clear in the way she talks about him. I'm pretty sure he's more of a father figure in her life than a brother. It's obvious he loves her and takes time out of his very busy life for her. I don't know why that makes me like him even more, but it does.

Maybe it's because Rebecca is such a good person. I don't know what I would have done without this job over the last year, but it has been a godsend. I'll never be able to thank her enough for it and it's another reason I work so hard for her.

I give up trying to tame the wild mess of curls and pull it into a high ponytail. I don't know why I'm getting so worked up about this. Lucas is coming into the office today to look over the models Rebecca picked for the next photoshoot of her newest line—one she's hoping will hit it big. At the moment we are barely breaking even, and I know she wants to prove to her brother that she can do this.

She wants her brother to look over the models with her because she wants a man's perspective. I'm not sure I agree with her. I feel like a woman's opinion is what's important. They are the ones most likely to buy it, so they have to be the ones whose eye it catches. Or maybe I don't like the idea of the man I've been crushing on for over a year staring at beautiful women all day. It makes a knot form in my stomach.

Maybe he'll suck. I'll meet him and he'll open his mouth and this crush will go right out the freaking window. I could only be so lucky if that were to happen. A lot of the articles I've read about him have said he can be somewhat of a jerk but is good at what he does. That he always knows where to invest his money and can predict upcoming trends.

My phone dings and I see it's Rebecca.

Rebecca: You all set for today?

I pick it up to respond, but she beats me to it.

Rebecca: Stupid question. Of course you're ready. You always are.

Me: I'll grab you coffee on my way in. Take a deep breath.

I walk back into my bedroom/living room and toss the phone onto the bed. I reach for the dress I picked out for today. I spent way too much time thinking about what I would wear today. It's not as if I even have a ton to

choose from, really. Everyone in the office always dresses nice. I try to make do with what I have. When I shop for clothes I try to make sure I can style the things I get in different ways so I get more use out of them.

I went with a white dress with small pink flowers all over it and pair it with gold sandals. I know I'll likely be on my feet a lot today, running around getting anything Rebecca might need. I wanted something cute but comfy, something that might catch Lucas's eye. Though I'm not sure what I'd do if I caught it.

I've never been great with guys before. Probably because I've spent most of my life ignoring them as they have done the same to me. I'll probably freeze up like a deer caught in headlights. It's already going to be hard to not be a fumbling mess when I'm in front of him.

I give myself one last look in the mirror and run my hands down my curves. It's hard to hide my breasts and ass when they're as big as they are. My curves have never really bothered me until the last year while I've been working around some of the prettiest models in the world. It has made me start to question how I feel about my body. I for one never thought I'd be working for a lingerie company when I was getting my business degree, but here I am, thrust into the fashion world. A world where my size is definitely frowned upon.

I let out a sigh, reminding myself that I'm perfect how I am and these curves aren't going anywhere. I love carbs way too much. Not to mention when I do try to cut back, the scale never changes. So why bother denying myself what I want? I shake off the negative thoughts in my head and grab my purse. I look at myself one last time in the mirror and smile. Positive vibes and kind words only.

TWO

LUCAS

I check my watch to make sure that we aren't running behind. If there's one thing that bothers me most it's being late. I lean back when I see I have more than enough time, even with the how terrible traffic is. As if my mom knows I'm not busy, my phone rings.

"Ma," I say in greeting.

I know what's coming and I don't want to talk about it right now, but she'll call and call until I answer. Besides, after the small scare we had last month I'm always a little on edge when I see her number come up on my screen. The last time it was the head of security calling to tell me she'd been admitted to the hospital after fainting.

We found out she'd had a mini stroke, and ever since then it set me and my sister off balance. Our mom is all we've ever really known. Our father took off shortly after my sister Rebecca was born. I've always been the man of the house and I've taken that responsibility seriously my entire life.

Over the last month, since my mom had her stroke, she's come up with this idea that she has to make sure I'm taken care of and happy. Which she has decided can only be accomplished by marriage. Even the word *marriage* sounds so foreign to me. It's not something I've ever given much thought to. The only relationships I'm familiar with are the ones I have with my family. Beyond that, my only focus is making money. I want to make sure that they'd be taken care of if anything ever happens to me.

"I knew you'd be awake already," she sighs into the phone.

Where else would I be on a weekday morning at seven a.m.? My days always start at five. I work out, eat breakfast, and answer any emails that might have collected overnight.

“How are you feeling today, Ma?” I ask, not taking the bait.

“Well, tomorrow night is the Stein Charity Gala, and I’m going to bring some women with me I’d love for you to meet,” she says in her sweetest voice, knowing that I can’t get out of this.

I’m the biggest donor to the Stein Foundation. It’s an organization set on helping single mothers in need. I’ve been working with them since I made my first million many years ago. Now my mom is involved with them. If there’s one event I can’t get out of it, it’s theirs. She has me cornered and she knows it.

“That might be awkward since I’m already bringing a date.”

The lie rolls right off my tongue. That should probably make me feel bad, but fuck, it’s worse when she throws women at me. I always feel like a total asshole when I politely tell them I’m not interested. Some don’t take it so well and even push further. One woman my mom tried to set me up with showed up at my office.

I know my mother means well, but it’s starting to make my life hell. I’m done with it. Her throwing women at me has had the opposite effect. I don’t want anything to do with them now.

“Really?” The excitement is clear in her voice, making me feel instantly guilty. “Where did you meet her?”

“Through Rebecca, she works with her.” Damn, another lie rolling right off way too easily.

She lets out a sound of surprise. “One of her models?”

“Yes.” I’m already in this lie, waist deep. No sense in backing out now.

“Okay, well, I guess I’ll see you tomorrow then.” Her tone is flat like she’s distracted. “I’ll talk to you later. Love you.” She hangs up before I can respond. I chalk it up to her wanting to call my sister and dig around, knowing she can get more from her than me.

I sigh as I run my hand through my hair. I might have gotten my mom to back off for today, but tomorrow will come and I’ll have to deal with the fallout. Maybe I can just fake it? I could say my date got sick or something. I’m not worried about Rebecca. When my mom calls she’ll know what I’ve done and play along.

My driver pulls up to the building my sister leased for her new business. Pride fills me with how far she’s come. She’s too hard on herself about where it is. From my research, she’s doing more than well for a new business like hers, even if she doesn’t see it in herself. But if I’m honest, I don’t care if the

place is bleeding money, I just want her to do something she loves. I've made enough money for all of us to live well and I'll keep making sure that it stays the same for our family to come. Maybe not family for me, but when my sister decides to have one.

I don't wait for my driver and open the door myself. When I walk inside I pause when I see my sister standing there waiting for me. She comes over and gives me a hug, and I can tell she's already laughing.

"I love you, but sending Ma my way? Really?"

"About that," I start, but she cuts me off.

"I have a line of models coming today. I'm sure one would be more than willing to be a fake date for you." She wiggles her eyebrows. "Maybe it could turn into more."

"Please don't tell me you're on Ma's side," I groan. I can't have both of them after me. That would be cruel and unusual punishment.

"Guess you'll find out soon enough." She winks at me as she hits the button for the elevator, and I roll my eyes. The last thing I want is for a group of women to think I'm interested. Because at the end of the day, I know all they see when it comes to me. Money.

THREE

AVA

I set Rebecca's coffee down on her desk before rushing back to mine. I have a pile of emails to go through already and I need to fix a few shipments that went out wrong. I sigh at the stupid mistakes someone else made that are going to take extra time that I don't have to fix. If they had taken one second to check their orders, it would have saved everyone the hassle.

I glance up to the waiting room to see a crowd of beautiful women coming in. But my breath catches as the elevator doors open and I see him. I stand up so I can get a better view and look him up and down. My heart starts to pound. He's saying something to Rebecca and she laughs in response.

How is he even more handsome in person? I peel my eyes away from him and sit back down in front of my computer screen. I pretend that I'm doing something when really, I'm trying to get myself together. Why do I love seeing that he's so good to his sister? For some reason that makes me like him ever more. *Because you don't know what family is really like*, my brain chimes in, and I try to push those thoughts away.

It makes me think that he would be a family man. The whole white picket fence and two point five kids package. It's something I've always longed for but would never dare give voice to it. It's hard to dream of something that feels so out of reach. Work and school, I can hold on to. Those things are dependent on my actions. I'll never go for something I can't do on my own, and that man seems like he's so far out of reach. I curse myself for having this attachment, as if I can somehow control it.

I finish up what I need to do at my desk just as Rebecca comes into the office. Thankfully alone. I'm irritated with myself for getting so worked up

about Lucas, so I'm going to go the extra mile with being professional today.

"I can't do this," she says, and there's a plea in her eyes.

"You're going to be just fine," I say, standing up and taking her hands in mine. "You've got this. We're going to call the models in just like we talked about and find the perfect face for the new line. Just breathe with me."

She smiles but does as I ask. We both take a breath at the same time and slowly let it out. I can feel some of the tension ease in her grip and she nods confidently.

"This line is incredible. You're incredible. And you've got me, so there's no way you can lose," I say and wink at her.

She pulls me into her arms and gives me a tight hug. "God, what would I do without you?"

I grab the iPad with all the information on the models and my coffee before we go out. In the back of the studio there's a large room we use for photography, both of the models and the merchandise. The goal today is to bring in each model and do some test shots. Then we'll go through everything at the end of the day and decide which look and personality we think will fit best. It's going to be a long afternoon, and though I'm excited I'm not exactly looking forward to being in the presence of Lucas all afternoon. But I've worked hard for this job so I'm going to pull on my big girl panties and get to work.

Rebecca and I smile at the line of women waiting to enter as we walk through the door of the photo room. It's blindingly bright in here with all the lights and giant white walls that surround us. It's an adjustment when we walk in, but I see the table in the center and follow Rebecca over to it. When I blink a few times, I see Lucas coming over to us.

I'm surprised when he comes straight to me and holds out my chair. His scent rolls over me and it's a combination of fresh lemons and leather. His green eyes stare at me as if he can see inside me. Oh god, if only he could hear all the dirty thoughts going through my mind. He's tall and muscular but not overly bulky. He looks toned under his suit and I can only imagine total perfection behind the expensive material. His dark hair is styled perfectly and there's not a hair out of place. His jaw is shadowed with a day-old shave, but it doesn't make him look sloppy. Instead it makes him look impossibly hotter and I have to force myself to not make inappropriate noises at just the sight of him.

I realize I'm staring and have to look away. I smile politely as he stands

there holding my chair then take my seat. *He's being a gentleman*, I tell myself and try not to act like a lunatic. I'm sure he does this for everyone. But when I look out of the corner of my eye, I see Rebecca grabbing her own chair and sitting down. Maybe he couldn't catch hers in time because I was busy staring at him like the last cupcake in the bakery. *Get it together, Ava.*

"Lucas, this is Ava. She's the reason we're here today," she says and beams at me with pride. "I couldn't have done any of this without her encouragement and talent."

"You're the talent. I'm just the one who organizes your chaos," I say, reaching out and squeezing her arms. "And you need to stop it or you're going to make me blush."

Suddenly I feel Lucas close against me.

"I think I'd like to see that," he says, and I realize his lips are at my ear.

He wants to see me blush? Oh god, this guy has no idea how easy that's going to be.

"I'm going to have to ask my sister why she hasn't introduced us sooner."

That's all he says before I feel him step away and take the remaining seat on the other side of Rebecca. Praise God, because I don't think I can be next to that kind of power for more than a few seconds at a time. Jesus, the man is like a magnet and every part of my body is being pulled toward him.

I place my hand on my heart and take a breath before I grab the iPad and go over the models. Maybe seeing him look over these women like horses in a parade will kick whatever attraction I have to him.

"First up we have Amanda from Top Model. She's five ten, one hundred and seven pounds, and twenty years old," I say, clicking through her info.

As soon as I get the words out of my mouth, Amanda walks through the door. She takes about three steps before Lucas speaks up.

"No thank you, that will be all," he says, giving the model a glance before turning to Rebecca and me.

The model pauses and looks to us for clarification before we nod and she exits the room. Once the door is closed Rebecca turns to Lucas.

"You didn't even give her a chance to talk. A lot of this is based on personality. I asked you to come give me your advice, not take over."

His eyes flicker to me then back to Rebecca. "Rebecca, you asked me to help you. This beautiful line you've created is size inclusive. Which means every size, right?"

"Of course," Rebecca says to him with pride in her voice.

“I’ll stay quiet if you want me to, but you need to remember who this is meant for.”

He turns his eyes on me again, but this time he doesn’t look away. Under the power of his gaze I wiggle in my seat. Does he want me to say something because I’m plus size? I want to agree with him that the face of the campaign should represent everyone, but that’s not my job today. I’m in charge of presenting the models who have been sent through agencies and to answer questions when I’m asked.

“Let’s continue,” Rebecca says, oblivious to her brother staring a hole into me. “This time, Lucas, can you try to keep your opinion until the end?”

He finally looks away from me and nods at her. I watch out of the corner of my eye as he crosses his arms over his chest and leans back in his chair.

I announce the next model, who is similar to the one before, but she’s blonde rather than brunette. Rebecca asks her a few questions and we take a photo before she leaves. As the door closes, Rebecca turns and gives me a questioning look. I shake my head and she nods.

“Yeah, me neither,” she says.

Lucas remains silent.

For the next three hours it’s the same thing. It’s daunting to have the same reaction, but I’m starting to think Lucas was on to something. I could tell by the first three steps they took into the room that they wouldn’t be what we were looking for. Maybe Rebecca should have specified more curves from the agencies when she sent out the requests.

“I did,” she says when I quietly ask her about it. “I told them I wanted all shapes, sizes and colors. But I swear it’s like they sent a Xerox copy of the same woman fifty times.”

I feel Lucas’s eyes on me again, but I ignore it. He’s driving me crazy since he decided to keep quiet. All I want to know is why he keeps looking over here.

“Let’s take a break. I’ve had lunch brought in, so get something to eat and then we’ll finish the rest of the models afterwards.”

As soon as I stand up, he’s on me. He holds out my chair and steps close as I stand up.

“Thank you,” I say as I go to walk past him, but he doesn’t move.

“I need you,” he says, like he’s gotten his words twisted. He shakes his head and tries again. “Go out with me. Tomorrow.”

There’s no question in his words, just a statement telling me what I’m

going to do. I can't help but laugh a little. "What?"

The thought of going on a date with Lucas is crazy sauce. Why would he ever ask to go out with someone like me? He could have that hallway full of models and they'd probably be okay sharing even a piece of him.

"I'm sorry. I'm not doing this right. Would you go with me to the Stein Gala tomorrow night? I'd like you to be my date."

Oh shit, he's actually serious.

"Um, I don't know," I hedge, needing a moment to process this.

First of all, he's asking me out. Holy shitballs. Second, I know I don't have a single thing that's appropriate for a gala or whatever the hell that is.

"Oh, that's a great idea," Rebecca says as she walks back over with a plate of food. "Our mom has been on him about taking someone, and Lucas lied this morning and said he had a date already when he didn't." She rolls her eyes and smiles at him like this is his normal behavior.

The idea that he's asking me because he needs to cover his lie to his mom makes me feel so stupid and a little pissed off. I might not be on the same level of women that he's used to, but I'm worth more than that.

"No thank you," I say as I brush past him and make my way over to the food table.

Suddenly I feel like I want to cry. I'm mad at myself for momentarily living in a fantasy world and getting my hopes up. What was I thinking? Of course a guy like him wouldn't want me.

"Ava," he calls as he comes over next to me. "It's not like that."

I ignore him as he follows me. I grab a plate and decide I'm going to put some food on top of my feelings so I can make them be quiet. I start grabbing things and piling my plate up while he talks beside me.

"That's not why I asked," he says in a low voice, and I glance over at him and raise an eyebrow. "Okay, so I do need a date, but that's not why I'm asking you."

"You don't owe me an explanation," I say as I get to the end of the buffet and grab a drink. "You don't owe me anything." I raise my chin in challenge and I see there's frustration and anger in him brewing below the surface.

"I'm not good at this. I went about it all wrong. Let me make it up to you." He says his words smoothly, like warm butter.

For a second I think about just giving in to him, but I don't want to be played for a fool. "We've got to get back to work. I don't think this is the time or place for...for..." I try to think about what to call this and just huff.

“Whatever you’re doing.”

I begin to march away from him, feeling pretty damn high and mighty. Until I hear him from behind me.

“That’s not a no!” he calls out right as I reach the table and Rebecca tells us she’s ready to call in the other applicants.

FOUR

LUCAS

I *'m a complete fucking idiot.*

I sit back in my seat and keep my eyes on Ava as they look over the models and ask them questions. I have no desire to listen to the applicants, but hearing Ava talk is like music to my ears.

Could I have been any more of an asshole to her? She probably thinks I'm some rich douchebag who always gets what he wants. If I'm honest, she's not really wrong, I just don't want her to see me like that. The reason people think I'm an asshole is because I like things the way I like them. I've made my money doing it my way and that's the best way to do it. When people question me on it, I tend to get angry.

But the second Ava walked in the room I knew I'd do whatever it took to get her to go out with me. And she might be playing hard to get, but she can't be in denial about the attraction between us. It's like I'm being pulled to her by some invisible magnet and I'm not about to fight it. I've never had a woman turn my head the way she has. And a roomful of models don't compare to her beauty.

"Okay, so that's it," Rebecca says, leaning back in her chair. She lets out a disappointed sigh and shakes her head. "I don't think any of those will work."

"I agree. None of them had the right look or personality," Ava says disappointedly. "I wish you could have found someone who loves this brand as much as we do."

"I think you're both blind," I blurt out. Apparently, my attraction to Ava has made me lose my cool.

"What are you talking about?" Rebecca says as her eyes narrow. "You

didn't like any of them either. Hell, you didn't even bother looking at them."

She's right. I had my eyes on Ava the whole time.

"I'm saying that you haven't been looking at the perfect model who's right in front of your face." I glance at Ava, who turns around and looks behind her. I can feel my lips pull into a smile. "Ava should be the star of the new campaign. The lingerie is designed for her curves."

This time I allow my eyes to trail down her body and linger on the places where her dress hugs her tight. I make a show of appreciating every inch of her and let her see me do it.

"Her body was made for it." I run my tongue along my teeth. "She's the one."

My eyes lock with hers and I see fear. But I also see need. She's a woman who hasn't had a man yet. She may have let a boy who didn't know what he was doing have the privilege of touching her. But she's never had a man do things to her that made her see god. And I'm the cocky bastard who's going to give it to her.

"Oh my god, Lucas, you're a genius!" Rebecca squeals and claps her hands together. "God, why didn't I think of this before? Ava, you have to do it!" Rebecca is practically jumping out of her skin with excitement.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down, Rebecca. I'm not going to model the lingerie."

"Why wouldn't you? Don't you like what I've created?"

My sister is using the pout tactic. It's damn near impossible to resist her when she pulls that out.

"No, it's not that. Gosh, Rebecca, you know I love everything you make," Ava says, trying to soften the blow.

"Then what's the problem? Is it money? I'll pay you double what I was going to pay these models."

"Triple," I say, and Rebecca nods.

Ava bites her lip and looks between the two of us. "But I don't know anything about modeling." She tries again to find an excuse.

"Between the photographer and me, we'll take care of everything. All you have to do is show up and look fabulous." Rebecca reaches out and takes her hands. "I would be forever in your debt if you did this for me. You have been my biggest cheerleader and I can't think of a more perfect representative of the new line than you."

"I don't know," Ava says, and I can see she's on the fence. She wants to

do this, but her doubt about if she can is holding her back.

“Pretty please?” Rebecca begs, seeing her resolve weakening.

“Okay,” Ava whispers, biting her plump lower lip.

Rebecca lets out a sound that only dogs can hear as she wraps up Ava and bounces with excitement.

“Perfect,” I say, standing up and putting my hands in my pockets. “I’ll send someone over to your place tomorrow to get you ready.” I already hate that I won’t see her again until then. That’s hours away. I’m not good at waiting for something I want. Never have been.

“Ready for what?” Ava asks, looking over Rebecca’s shoulder at me, her big eyes widening even more. Fuck, she’s beautiful. I want to grab her and pull her into me.

“For the gala, of course. We’ll need the new face of Beautifully Bare to be there tomorrow night. As my date, of course.”

I smile widely, giving her a big toothy grin. I want her to know I have her locked in my sights, and there’s no getting away when I want something. Ever.

Rebecca lets Ava go and runs off as she talks a million miles an hour about set designs and makeup artists. I go over to Ava and stand in front of her.

“You sneaky bastard,” she says as she glares at me.

“I’ll tell you a secret,” I say, leaning down close to her. So close that she can feel my breath against her neck. “I always get what I want. And I’ve never wanted anything more in my life.”

I brush my lips against the shell of her ear and then take a step back, forcing myself to not go any further.

“Tomorrow,” I say, as both a promise and a warning. Then I turn and walk out the door.

FIVE

AVA

“I thought you said tomorrow?” I ask Lucas as he pushes off the sleek SUV he’s leaning against.

He’s got that cocky smile that has been driving me crazy. Though who could really blame me? Every model around can’t keep their eyes off him. But I did notice that he didn’t give them so much as a glance. Even though he was there to assess the models. I can’t wrap my head around him.

“I was never great at waiting for what I want.”

“Or do you not like being told no? I bet you’re not used to it.” I don’t wait for a response as I walk right past him. And god help me, I breathe deep as I pass, hoping to catch his scent. I’m losing my mind because of him. On one hand I wanted to smack him today, and on the other I fell a little more for him. What is wrong with me?

He falls into step beside me as I walk. “You’re right, I’m not used to being told no,” he admits with a shrug.

“I’m guessing it’s even more shocking coming from a woman,” I add with a shake of my head.

I walk faster because I’m already late. I have no idea how I forgot about my weekly happy hour with Benny. We’ve been doing it since our sophomore year of college. We like to call it happy hour, but in reality neither of us is great at holding our liquor, so we just meet at a coffee shop and get buzzed on espresso. We learned that lesson the hard way the night we met at our first college party. Since then, we’ve been best friends and skipping parties for coffee houses.

“I’m not talking about other women. I’m only talking about you.” He

runs a hand through his hair and looks frustrated. It somehow makes him even more attractive. I'm getting a glimpse of his vulnerable side, which I'm guessing no one sees.

"Well, you got what you wanted. I'm going out with you tomorrow, so if you don't mind I have somewhere to be," I tell him.

"I'm sure Benjamin won't mind if I tag along."

There's a trace of jealousy in his tone, and I stop midstep, turning to face Lucas. How the heck does he know where I'm going? Before I know what's happening, his hand goes to my elbow and he moves me forward.

"Close your mouth or I'll put it to use," he says close to my ear.

I'm so shocked for a moment I move with him, and it takes me a moment before I try to jerk my arm free. But he's got a firm grip. It doesn't hurt, but it's completely unbreakable.

"You're underhanded," I hiss.

I'm more annoyed with myself because right now I should not be feeling all this attraction pumping through me. I should be pissed. I don't want to be like one of those models who would have lain naked on the table for him today.

"If it means getting what I want? Yes. How do you think I've gotten where I am?"

I make a huffing noise because I can't think of a response. All I keep thinking about is the hold he has on my elbow. How does a businessman have rough hands, and why do I keep wondering what those rough hands would feel like as they glide along my body?

"Though I haven't gotten much done today. You've proven to be very..." He pauses, as if he's reluctant to admit it. "Distracting," he finally finishes, and I see his jaw tighten.

"That seems far-fetched. You've been quite busy, as somehow in the short time since you left the photo shoot, you found out that I had plans tonight. And with whom." I didn't even put it in my calendar because it's a weekly event. There's no need.

"If you have enough money you can find out anything you like as fast as you like."

"You know, you sound like a jerk," I throw back at him. "If you are as underhanded as you claim, wouldn't you try to be smoother? Aren't you supposed to be charming?"

"You're throwing me off. Which I find refreshing."

I let his words bounce around in my head, reminding me that I'm more of a challenge to him. Once he gets what he wants he'll be bored and off to the next. While I'll be left brokenhearted and still have to see him because I work for his sister at a company he practically owns. Crap, that makes him my boss, doesn't it?

"Avey!" Benny shouts when he sees me.

His eyes go to Lucas and then widen in surprise. He knows about my crush, which makes this a little embarrassing. Benny goes to pull me into a hug, but Lucas stops him. He steps in front of me and holds out his hand.

"Lucas Caldwell," he tells Benny, his face unreadable.

Benny laughs. "Oh, I know who you are. Seems we have a lot to catch up on this week, Avey." He takes Lucas's hand. "Call my Ben. Everyone does. Except my girl." He's smiling so big, not even caring that Lucas isn't letting me near him. In fact, I think my best friend is finding it funny.

"Your girl? Well, Ben, I thought instead of the coffee shop we could go next door to Per Se."

"I think I like him already if he can get us in there." Benny smiles even wider, showing off one of his dimples that always charm everyone.

"One of the perks of being an investor," Lucas says like it's no big deal he's part owner of one of the most popular restaurants in the city. It's impossible to get into, but I hear it has the best food. My mouth is already watering thinking about it.

"We don't like him," I tell Benny, and he throws his head back and laughs.

"I'll try harder to keep that in mind."

Lucas guides us across the street and we step into the restaurant. The cute hostess behind the desk perks up at the sight of Lucas, which is shocking because most of the time women fall all over Benny. He's fit and stylish and always well put together. Too bad for them he's into men. It just goes to show how much attention Lucas gets from the opposite sex.

"Three. A back booth." I peek up at Lucas, who doesn't even look at the hostess. He's looking down at me.

"Of course," she says, picking up menus as she purses her lips. She doesn't like being dismissed.

"What do you think of the place?" Lucas asks against my ear, his warm breath tickling me.

I glance around, taking in the restaurant. "It's breathtaking. I'm not sure

I'm dressed up enough to be in here," I confess.

"How could something so breathtaking not belong?" he asks as he leads me to our table. I scoot closer to him as we weave around the tables, and I hate how much I love the way he feels against me.

"There's the charm I've been wondering about. I knew you could do it."

"I'm just being honest." He leans down and steals a kiss against my neck.

I nearly fall off balance, but he's got a hold of me, and before I know it we've reached the table. When I glance over at the hostess, she's standing there waiting on us with a look of shock on her face. I assume it's because she's surprised that someone like Lucas would want someone my size.

I slide into the booth and Lucas follows in next to me. Even though it's a big booth he gives me no space. Benny slides into the other side and he's still smiling like a loon. We take our menus and I start to go over it while Lucas orders a bottle of wine for the table.

"There are too many things to choose from. I don't think I can pick," I admit.

"Don't worry, Ava. This won't be our last time here if you enjoy it." I look over at him. He's not even opened his menu. "Allow me to order for you." He takes the menu from my hands and closes it. "I can do the same for you, Ben, if you like."

"I'm sure you know what's best." Benny closes his menu and sets it down. His blue eyes bounce between the two of us. He's enjoying this way too much.

When the waiter returns with our wine, Lucas orders for us in French, taking me once again by surprise. When he's finished he looks over and gives me a wink.

"Showoff," I mutter.

"I'm doing my best. You're hard to impress."

Benny snorts. "Or she's good at hiding it."

Lucas's hand goes to my thigh under the table. His fingers slide to the hem of my dress and pushes up the material so that he's touching me without my dress in the way. He absently strokes my skin as Benny fires questions at him. I can't keep up with what he's saying while his hand is rubbing me. The roughness of his fingers is even better than I thought it could be.

"I hear you're trying to open your own gym," Lucas says, and that catches my attention.

Benny has been trying to get capital to open his gym for a while. It's

something he's passionate about. He does personal training in online videos, and it's super popular, but he wants a place of his own. It's what he went to college for—he busted his ass to double major in sports fitness and business.

“Yes, I'm working on it.”

“Pitch me,” Lucas says, and Benny looks taken aback for a moment.

“Right now?” His eyes are wide like he doesn't believe him.

“Why not?” Lucas shrugs, taking a sip of his wine.

I pick up my wine glass and take a few big gulps. I'm feeling nervous for Benny because Lucas could make his dreams come true. And as much as Lucas is driving me crazy, I'd want nothing more than Benny to get what he's always wanted. Who doesn't want that for their best friend?

Benny launches into his sales pitch, and I keep sipping on my wine. I'm trying to focus on what he's saying, but Lucas's hand is too distracting as it ever-so-slowly slides up my leg. Shamelessly I spread my legs a little and blame it on the wine making me feel bold. Lucas's body goes rock solid beside me when I do it. Heat hits my cheeks, and I don't know if it's the wine or a true blush.

I'm thankful when the food arrives. Maybe I'll be able to think straight again because now Lucas will have to remove his hand. This is why I don't drink. I can't trust my judgment. But when the food is placed before him, he doesn't remove his hand. Instead, he keeps on stroking me, clearly not wanting to let go.

He leans over towards me. “You should eat,” he says into my ear while giving my thigh a squeeze. I pick up my fork and take a bite of the sliced beef. It melts in my mouth and I'm happy that I can finally let out a moan. But just as I do, the hand on my thigh tightens.

I decide to ignore it and keep eating. “This is wonderful,” I say, bringing another bite to my mouth. I glance over at Lucas and I notice he and Benny have stopped talking. Lucas is watching me eat and hasn't even touched his own food.

“Aren't you going to eat?” I ask as I lick my lips, suddenly feel self-conscious.

Benny is chowing down and all his focus on his food. I don't blame him. I would be too if Lucas wasn't so damn distracting.

“I enjoy watching you eat.”

My face heats and I pick up my wine glass and take another big drink. Lucas pours me more when I finish the glass.

“Careful. She’s a lightweight,” Benny jokes, but I don’t care. I need this right now.

Finally, Lucas looks back to Benny. “Do you have locations in mind?” he asks as he reaches for a fork. But instead of taking a bite to his mouth, he brings it to mine. I open for him and it’s just as good as my dinner.

Then I blink and wonder what the hell just happened. Did I really just let him feed me? Okay, maybe I have had too much wine.

“Yeah. I was thinking—”

Lucas cuts him off. Reaching into his suit jacket, he pulls out his card. “Send them over to me and anything else you can think of. I think you’ve got yourself an investor.” Lucas looks over to me. “If Ava thinks I should.”

“Why are you asking me?” I say, looking between the two of them.

“I like hearing your opinion.”

“Yeah, I think you should do it,” I rush out. Benny is out of his seat before I even finish what I’m saying.

“I’m going to get on this right now. Thank you for the opportunity and for dinner. I’ll be emailing you tonight,” he tells him.

“No rush. I’ll be preoccupied for the next few days.” He looks over at me as he says it. Our eyes lock, and his hold so much promise.

I don’t even notice Benny saying goodbye and leaving the table. But what I do catch is Lucas saying that he’d be distracted for only a few days. I guess his attention doesn’t last long.

“That doesn’t mean I’m going to sleep with you,” I blurt out. “You can’t buy me off.”

What is this man doing this to me? Why is he working so hard for something he could get anywhere? Why doesn’t he pursue someone who at least knows what they’re doing with this flirting thing. I can’t stop blushing every two seconds and losing my train of thought. I don’t know if I want to run away or jump on him.

“What about blackmail? I learned a lot about you today. Rebecca even gave me your résumé.” He smiles and says it teasingly, but it still hurts a little. I jerk back, but he pulls me against him. “Your secrets are safe with me. I promise you that.” He leans in, his mouth brushing against mine. “Like the fact that you’re going to let me finish what I’ve started.”

He slides his hand up to my panties and runs his fingers along them before he pushes them to the side and slips into my wet folds. I should pull back. Maybe even smack him. But I don’t because I’m lost in his eyes. I’m

willing him to go further as my body begs for it, but I can't push the words past my lips.

My breath catches in my throat as his mouth comes down on mine.

SIX

LUCAS

The feel of her warm, wet pussy against my fingers is like fresh silk. When I push into her tight opening it's almost too much for me to handle. The kiss is wild and possessive, and I don't know if I can stop. But somewhere in the back of my mind, a voice tells me that we're in a restaurant and people could be watching. We're in the back and away from most prying eyes, but she's not in my bed and that thought makes me growl. I want her on her back with her legs wrapped around me. She's mine, and the fact that she doesn't know it yet is making my skin tight.

"Lucas, what are you doing to me?" she whispers as her head rolls back to rest against the booth. Her eyes are closed and her cheeks are flushed as I work my fingers in and out of her wet pussy.

"Getting a taste of your sweet cream," I say as I work them harder and rub her clit with my thumb. "I want you to cum on them so I can lick them clean. I'm hungry, and the only thing I want to eat is you."

Her eyelids are heavy as she looks up at me through her lashes. She's flushed all the way down to the front of her dress, and I lean forward, kissing her swollen lips again. I run my tongue along her bottom lip as she gasps, and I can feel myself smiling. Never in a million years did I think I'd be getting her off in a crowded restaurant, but I'm terrible with delayed gratification.

"You're as soft as a petal," I say as I rub my nose against hers and flex my fingers inside her. "That's what you are, Ava. You're my sweet petal."

"I'm close," she whispers, and I nod.

"I can feel it," I say as I run my free hand along the back of her shoulder and pull her into my chest. She presses her mouth to my neck as her orgasm hits so her sounds of pleasure are muffled. "I want all of it, don't hold back,"

I encourage. I massage inside her pussy with both my fingers while my thumb circles her clit.

She grips my suit jacket tightly as the orgasm rolls over her. Her body is soft and her hot curves press against me while I wring out every ounce of her pleasure. Her warm, sticky release coats my fingers, and I slide so easily in and out of her. My cock is a steel rod running down my leg, trying to rip the seams of my slacks. I glance down to see a wet spot where the head is, and I can feel my own sticky pre-cum smeared against my thigh.

When she's caught her breath and leaned back a little to look at me, I pull my fingers out of her warm pussy and move her panties back in place. Then I bring them to my mouth and suck the shiny juices off of them. Her warm taste is better than anything I've ever put in my mouth, and she watches me with wide eyes as I savor the taste of her. She's tangy and sweet, and once I've sucked my fingers clean I reach out and touch her lips before I slide them into her mouth just a little.

"Suck on them like you'd suck my cock," I say, my voice husky with need.

She's shy at first, but her untrained mouth opens slightly and the tip of her pink tongue comes out to lick them nervously. I have to bite my lip to keep from groaning. The inexperience makes me impossibly harder.

"Have you ever had a dick in your mouth?" I ask, and she looks up at me as she sucks on the ends of my fingers and shakes her head. "Fuck. Are you trying to make me cum on myself?"

She licks the pads of my fingertips as she wraps her lips around them. She sucks harder this time, and my body tenses while at the same time is rendered completely powerless. She's got it all right now and I've never felt so vulnerable.

"Is everything to your liking, Mr. Caldwell?"

Suddenly Ava drops my fingers from her mouth and turns away from me. Her face is bright red with embarrassment and now I'm pissed.

I glance over to see the hostess Chantal from earlier and give her a death stare. She's made more than one advance in the times I've visited this restaurant and I've made it clear that nothing will happen between us. I don't date people I have work ties to. But I guess that's just one more way that Ava is the exception.

"We're finished, Chantal. You can clear the dishes," I say as I stand up and reach for Ava's hand. "We're leaving, petal."

She won't look at me as she takes my hand and allows me to lead her out of the restaurant. When we get outside the air has turned a little chilly, so I take off my suit jacket and go to put it around Ava's arms.

"No, thank you," she says and brushes it away.

"Let me keep you warm," I say playfully and step closer holding it out again.

"I said no. But that doesn't seem to mean anything to someone like you." Her words are sharp and I see tears forming in her eyes.

"Ava, I'm so sorry. What's wrong? Did the hostess upset you back there? If so, I'll go in and make sure she doesn't work in this city again."

She rolls her eyes as her anger builds. "I'm sure you could. But let me think why I could possibly be upset." She places her finger on her chin and pretends to think. "Maybe it was the fact that you gave me my first ever orgasm in the middle of a crowded restaurant. Or maybe you had me suck your fingers like a cock and I've never done that either. Then that beautiful hostess comes over and you've probably slept with her."

"No, I haven't slept with her. Ava, please. Let me explain."

"I don't want an explanation. I just want to go home." She turns her back on me and walks towards her car.

I should let her go. I've fucked this all up and I should just let her have what she's asking for. But I'm not smart when it comes to her, and I pause for only half a second before I chase her down.

When she goes to open her car door, I push it closed and turn her to face me. She's not happy with me, but she doesn't push me away. I've never had someone hold so much power over me with just one look. It's maddening to not have something that I want so desperately within my control. She causes me to feel confused and unsure but also like I've been in a fog my whole life until she showed up. I don't know how to explain to her all that I'm feeling, but I need to be as honest as I can.

"I'm not good at this, okay?"

"No shit," she says. She's still angry with me.

"You may have never gotten off before, but I've never been in love before." The words tumble out of my mouth and her eyes widen. "Just one look at you and I was a goner. I don't know how to date or to smooth talk. I don't know how to be charming to someone like you."

"What do you mean *like me*?" she asks softly.

I step closer and reach up and cup her face with both my hands. "You are

the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. And not only are you smart and challenging, but I'm feeling something I've never felt before." I lean in and kiss her lips softly. I rest my forehead against hers and let out a breath. "I'm sorry about the restaurant. I didn't mean to push you. I just couldn't stop. I don't know how to go slow when there's something I want. I've never done something like that either before. Had no control."

"I'm not sorry you did it," she whispers, and I kiss her again. "I think I was just overwhelmed with emotions."

"You telling me that you've never sucked a cock before or that you're completely untouched makes me want you even more. I can't control myself and I've never had that happen."

I press her against her car and run my hands down to her ass to hold her tight to me. I'm a bastard because all I can think about is pushing her dress up and fucking her right here. But she deserves better than that.

With all the strength I have I release her ass and lean back to look her in the eyes. "I want you. And I want this," I say, pointing between us. "But I can go slow if that's what you need." I take her hand and bring it to my lips as I run them along her knuckles. "There will be a knock on your door first thing in the morning. And I'll see you at exactly five o'clock for the gala."

"Maybe we don't have to go slow?" She says it like a question and bites her lip. There is desire in her eyes but also uncertainty. I want to show her that I can be the man she deserves. That I'm not just a one-night stand. She is begging me for that trust with one look and I'll die before I break my vows to her.

"The fact that you are asking me means that you're not ready tonight. Don't worry, petal. I'm not going anywhere without you."

She smiles, and the storm cloud from earlier passes, but as if she's thought of something she blurts it out as soon as it comes to her. "You told Benny you'd be free in a few days."

"I figured by that point you'd need some time to sleep to recover." I wink at her as I take a step away from her. She rolls her eyes, but this time it's playful.

I watch her get safely into her car and wait for her to pull away. When she does I call for my driver and then tell him to follow her home. We stay a good distance back and I watch as she lets herself into her apartment, and then I wait for the light to come on. It's harder than I thought possible to tell him to take me home, but Ava isn't a fling. She isn't someone who's going to

warm my bed for a single night. She's the one who's going to be in it for the rest of our lives. One night apart won't kill me. Right?

SEVEN

AVA

I lie in bed, looking up at the ceiling and worrying my bottom lip. No matter how many times I try to weigh the pros and cons, I still don't know what to do about Lucas. The man has me tied up in so many knots. I fling the covers back knowing staying in the bed isn't going to get me closer to finding an answer.

I almost want to laugh like I have a choice in the matter. He had me in the palm of his hand last night. By the time I'd gotten to my car, he had me pressed up against it, and I would have done anything he asked me to. I was so close to begging it's not even funny. He has a way with words. He's arrogant at times but can be so sweet as well. It worked on me and for some reason I'm mad about it. Maybe that's why no other man has caught my attention before.

Maybe he's telling the truth and this isn't some challenge for him. I could be just as different for him as he is for me. I should be able to relate after how I acted last night. Look what I'd let him do to me while we were in his restaurant. Then I'd stormed out pissed and jealous. Lucas made me feel things I never have before and that's why I was so angry that he might have done the same with others.

I take a shower because it usually clears my head. Only this time it doesn't. I lean up against the shower wall, wondering what it would be like to shower with Lucas. What would he think when he saw me naked? I've come to the conclusion that it's going to happen one way or another. Maybe not tonight but soon enough.

After turning off the shower I step out and towel off my hair. I slip on my silk robe then hear my phone ding. I pick it up to see I have a text, then smile

like crazy because I know instantly who it's from.

Lucas: Answer the door.

I panic when I read it. He cannot be at my door right now! I can't see him yet. I just stepped out of the shower. A knock sounds at my front door and jump. I rush to the front door and look out the peephole. I breathe a sigh of relief when I see it's a delivery person. He said he'd be sending people over first thing.

I open the door to see a man standing there in a suit. When I look down, I see a white box and a coffee in his hand.

"Ms. Ava?"

"Yes," I say, wondering if I'm supposed to use a code word.

"Your breakfast is here."

"Ah thanks." I reach out to take the items from him. Delivery people are getting fancy these days.

"Would you like me to set it up in your dining area?"

"No, thank you." I have to stifle a laugh that my five-hundred-square studio would somehow have a dining table. "I can take it from here." He hands me the box. "Oh, wait, let me get my purse. I need to grab a tip."

"That's not necessary," he tells me. "I'd just like to remind you to lock the door behind me," he says then turns and leaves.

Okay then.

I set the box down on the kitchen counter and take a big gulp of the coffee. I moan at the flavor—it's made just the way I like it. I should have known he'd find that out. The man knows everything. When I open the box and see eggs Benedict, I know he's going to make me fall in love with him so hard.

A small hysterical bubble of laughter leaves me. I stop when his words from last night pop into my head for the millionth time. *I've never been in love before.* As if implying he already is. I don't know how to deal with it. He probably just meant that maybe he could fall in love with me.

My phone dings again.

Lucas: Enjoy your breakfast, petal. You leave in thirty for the spa.

Me: Thank you! I can't believe you sent me breakfast.

His response is instant.

Lucas: Thank me by never answering the door in your robe again.

My mouth falls open. How does he know everything? Jesus. I want to say something sassy back to him, but when I take a bite of my breakfast I know

he's won this round.

Me: I'll wear whatever you want if you send me a breakfast like this every day.

Lucas: Deal.

I stare at the single word, feeling like I just signed a contract I'll never get out of.

When I finish my breakfast my mind drifts back to Lucas when it should be focusing on work. I need to talk to Rebecca and see what me being the face for the new campaign will entail.

I grab some yoga pants and a shirt to wear at the spa. I'm guessing they will be doing my hair and makeup for tonight, and I'm sure a dress and shoes will be brought in as well. He said he would take care of everything. I have so many questions, but I decide to just go with it. I'm sure Lucas has all of this mapped out and there's no point in even asking. I'll go with the flow for once. It's kind of refreshing.

When a knock sounds at the door, I grab my purse and phone before slipping on some flip-flops. When I open the door the same man from before is standing there.

"Are you ready, Ms. Ava?" he asks.

"Ready as I'm going to be," I chirp.

I close my door behind me and lock it then we walk down to an SUV that looks a lot like the one Lucas was leaning against yesterday. He opens the door for me and I get in. The driver goes around and hops into the front seat.

"Are you Lucas's driver?" I ask, wanting to know as much about his life as I can.

"Yes, ma'am," he says as he pulls away from the curb. "Mr. Caldwell left some things for you in the back."

I look over to see a box sitting next to me. I pick it up and lift the lid. I gasp when I see what's inside. It's an e-reader. Mine broke a few months ago and I've had one on my wish list for a while, waiting for it to go on sale.

I touch the screen and see hundreds of books on it. Now that's sexy. I grab the note I see sitting in the box.

Petal,

Something to read while you're pampered today.

Yours,

L

I tuck the note into my purse then pull out my phone and text him.

Me: You have to stop. I already said I'm going tonight.

Lucas: I don't think I could stop if I tried, and I don't want to try.

Me: Thank you.

I drop back in my seat. I'm not even trying to fight with him on this. I may not have known him long, but I know he will likely win this battle, so why try? Especially when I'm loving it. My heart feels way too full right now. This is exactly like a fairy tale.

"So," I say, trying to see what kind of information this driver is willing to give up. "Does he do this for a lot of women?"

"No," he says simply, and our eyes meet in the rear-view mirror. "Never," he adds, and for some reason I believe him.

I pick up the e-reader and scroll until we get to the spa. When I step out of the SUV I feel underdressed. This place is super nice. I'm lucky the woman who rushes out to greet me is a sweetheart and doesn't bat an eyelash at what I have on. She takes me straight up and shows me around before asking me to change into a spa robe and explaining what she'll be doing today.

I spend all day getting pampered like I'm a freaking princess. And on top of that, every hour Lucas sends me another gift with sweet texts and messages in each box. Every gift and note is sweeter than the last, so by the time I have to put on my dress, I think I'm in love with him. He is so incredibly thoughtful. No wonder his sister adores him so much. I can see why. I also don't understand how his mom hasn't already married him up.

When they bring the dress out, my mouth falls open. "I can't pull that off," I tell Emma, the woman who's been with me all day.

"Oh yes, you can. Now come on. Your man is already here and we are having to hold him back from coming in!" she laughs.

I can't see anyone holding Lucas back, but I take her word for it. I have her help me get into the dress because I want to get to Lucas probably just as much as he wants to get to me.

EIGHT

LUCAS

I'm pacing as I wait for the elevator doors to open. I wasn't supposed to be here for another hour, but I couldn't stand it any longer. I've practically worn a hole in the plush carpet as I turn and walk to the other side of the room. For what has to be the millionth time.

When I hear the sound of the elevator, I can feel my heart beating in my chest. I stop and stare at the doors, willing them to open. Ever so slowly they part and out steps my beauty.

"Fuck me," I mumble as my jaw hits the floor.

Ava laughs and looks down at the floor shyly as she walks towards me.

I can't form words as my eyes eat up every inch of her. She takes a few more steps towards me, and the only thing I can come up with is that she looks like Jessica Rabbit. Her dress is red and cut low in the back with a high slit up her leg. Her breasts are pushed up and her thick waist is nipped in so her wide hips flare out. She's sex on legs, and if my tongue could fall out like one of those cartoon wolves, it would.

"Do you like it?" she asks, holding her hands out and doing a little twirl.

She's got on skyscraper heels that match her dress, and her hair is pulled into a low knot at the nape of her neck. So when I catch sight of her from behind, it's nothing but bare skin all the way down to the crack of her ass. She's practically naked.

"Lucas?" she prods, and I have to blink.

"You've literally taken my breath, petal," I say, placing my hand on my chest.

She smiles and laughs softly as she steps closer and covers the hand on my heart with her own. I glance down and see the amethyst bracelet I sent

her, and she's wearing the matching earrings and necklace.

"You're stunning," I say and shake my head. "I've never seen someone or something more beautiful in all my life." I bring the palm of her hand to my lips and kiss it. "If I live to be a thousand years old, I'll never see anything more exquisite."

"Thank you," she says softly as I pull her closer to me and slide my hand around to her bare back.

"You're practically naked," I say, letting my fingers trail up and down her silken skin. "I don't know if I can let you go out in public like this."

"I think you're going to have to get used to it once we do the photo shoot for the new campaign."

When I think about millions of people seeing her in her underwear, a current of jealousy runs through me. But there's also so much pride that she's the one representing the company and showing everyone what true beauty is. I'm grateful she's on my arm. And I'm going to make sure she stays that way.

"I think you need one more gift before we go," I say as I reach into my pocket and pull out a small velvet box.

"Oh my god," she gasps when I pop it open and show her the ten carat teardrop diamond ring.

"We don't have to talk about what this is or what it might mean. Not right this second. But I need you to wear it. To show the world that you're mine." I kiss her finger before I slip it on and then kiss the ring.

"Lucas, you can't be serious," she says, holding the rock up to the light.

"When it comes to how I feel about you, I'll never joke," I say as I take her hand in mine and lead her down the hall.

When we get to the end of it there's a black limo waiting for us. I wave off the driver and open the door for her, then help her step inside. I climb in behind her and close us inside then immediately raise the privacy glass.

"I don't want to mess up your makeup," I say as the car pulls away from the curb and I slide down on my knees in front of her. The split in her dress goes all the way to the top of her hip, so when I push up the material up it's easy to get to what I want. "So I'll kiss you down here instead."

She leans back as I pull her ass to the edge of the seat and stare down at her naked pussy.

"All that money I paid them today and they didn't have enough left over to buy you panties." I make a tsking sound and I kiss the inside of her thigh.

“They said it would show.” Her breath is shaky, but her eyes stay on me.

“I bet it would.” I kiss the top of her pussy and her short curls are soft and smell like lavender.

When I dip my tongue low and into her damp folds, she hisses and her hips rise off the seat. She tastes like she did at the restaurant. Tangy and sweet and I don’t know that I’ll ever have my fill of her. I use my fingers to make a V and spread her lips open. Then I tongue her clit before giving it long licks and circling it. She moans loudly and my cock throbs with every sound she makes. I’m going to have to get off before we get to the gala. I won’t be able to walk around all night with a baseball bat in my tuxedo.

Reaching down, I open my slacks and pull my cock out. I stroke it a few times, spreading the pre-cum down the length. Then I slide my fingers into her pussy to get some of her sticky juices so I can jack off with them.

Ava watches me with wide eyes, and I alternate between fucking her with my fingers and jacking off my cock. All while I suck on her pussy.

“Ca-can you put it in me?” she asks softly, and my eyes go to hers. “Just for a second. I want to know what it feels like.”

My cock leaks cum at the question and I lick her clit one more time before I sit up. “You sure?”

“Maybe just a little. Then you can kiss me again.”

“I’ll never deny you anything, petal,” I say as I rub the head of my cock between her soft folds and into her opening. I don’t go in far, just enough that she can kiss the tip with her pussy.

“It feels so big,” she gasps, looking down to where we’re slightly joined. “Can I have a little more?”

She scoots forward on the seat causing her pussy to slide down just an inch on to my cock. I pull back and rub the tip on her clit, spreading my pre-cum all over it. Then I lean down and lick it off then suck on it.

“I want more,” she whines as she rocks her hips.

“My mouth or my cock?” I ask, and her cheeks turn pink.

“Cock,” she whispers.

“This isn’t how I planned our first time,” I say as I slide the tip back through her puffy folds.

“This can just be a trial run,” she says and bites her red juicy lip.

“Yeah?” I say, and she nods. “This trial run is going to get you pregnant if you keep teasing that pussy on my cock.”

I push the head into her opening just like last time. Only this time, when

she lowers, she tenses and I feel her pussy pop. There's just a tiny bit of pink on my cock where she broke her cherry. But she doesn't stop. Instead she lowers herself onto it, taking more this time. She's got almost half my dick in her and I could go off just like this.

"You can pull out. Right?"

"If you want me to," I say as I give her shallow thrusts. Her pussy is tight and I have to work my way in, but every time I try to pull out she rocks down on it even more. "But you've got to stop moving or I won't be able to." I grab her hip with one hand and strum her clit with the other. "Why don't you cum on my cock so you can see what that feels like?"

She moans as her pussy clamps down on me. I thrust farther in this time, going the deepest I've been. I'm so close to getting her all the way down on my balls that I can't stop myself from giving her one last thrust and seating her fully on me. She's stretched wide, but she's wet and needy as she wiggles against me. I don't take my cock out. Instead I just hold it deep while I pet her clit until she goes off like a firecracker.

She pops on my cock with little baby orgasms all in a row. Her pussy squeezes and contracts and then another one hits. She cries out and her body flushes as her eyes close tightly. Waves of pleasure spike through her, and all I want to do is nut in her tight cunt. But I hold myself back, and though I know some of my cum is already creaming inside her, I save my load until she's done.

When the last of her clenches are done, I slide my cock out of her dripping wet pussy and press the tip against her clit. Then I jack off my cock with her cream all over it and cum on her warm pussy. I watch as the cum shoots out and covers her mound then drips down her lips and onto her thighs. She's coated in my cum and I use my other hand to rub it all over her. And damn me, I scoop some up in my fingers and shove it inside her because I'm a fucking bastard. I want her marked there, too, and I don't care if that makes me an asshole. She's mine and I want every man to smell my cum on her at ten paces.

When I've made sure she's coated, I pull her dress down and help her sit up in the limo while I sit beside her. I kiss her softly on her lips and then her neck, careful not to mess up her makeup. I take her chin in my hand and she looks up at me with so much love.

"We're staying ten minutes. Then I'm taking you home and I'm going to do that all goddamn night."

“I think that sounds like a wonderful plan,” she says as she wraps her arms around me.

NINE

AVA

We aren't lucky enough to be in and out in ten minutes. Everyone is begging for Lucas's attention. All the while he holds me close, not wanting to let me go. It makes me feel so special. I smile as people talk business with him. I'm not shocked that women and men want his attention. They're all trying to get a piece of him.

"Is this her?" I hear a woman say.

I turn to see someone who looks a lot like Rebecca but older. She's dressed to the nines and looks stunning.

"Ma." Lucas leans over, hugging his mom and kissing her cheek. "This is her. Ava, meet my mom, Iris."

I hold out my hand to shake hers and she gives me the biggest smile. She takes my hand and beams at the two of us.

"She's nothing like I thought she'd be when you said she was one of Rebecca's models." Her eyes roam over me, taking me in.

"Thanks?" I respond, not sure how to take that.

"Ma," Lucas says in warning.

"Oh! I didn't mean it like that! I'm sorry, I just mean she's lovely." Her eyes sparkle with excitement, and I believe her. "Oh. My. God," she gasps, going for my other hand when she sees the ring on it. I'm sure my face turns the same color as my dress.

No one else has noticed the ring since we got here. Which is crazy because the thing is giant. Lucas said no one would see it because my dress would get all the attention. But the ring made him feel better. The ring made me feel everything.

"You're engaged!" Iris shrieks.

So many heads turn to look at us, but Lucas just kisses my cheek. He's completely unbothered by being the center of attention. I'm sure not used to it and it makes me a bit uneasy.

"You just started dating?" Her eyes dart between us. I can't tell if she's excited about this or not now. This only makes my unease rise.

"Can you blame me? I saw her and had to have her."

This time he kisses me under my ear. The hand he has on my hip tightens in a possessive hold. I lick my lips, unsure if I should be in this conversation. Since we got here I've been happy to be in Lucas's arms. I saw most of the women looking at me and waiting for the moment when he was alone so they could pounce on him. But right now, I just need a moment to catch my breath. I don't want to be near Lucas and his mom in case this doesn't go well.

"I'm going to use the ladies' room." I try to pull from Lucas, but he doesn't let me go. "I'll be right back. Besides, you and your mom should catch up." I lean up and kiss his cheek, then he reluctantly lets me go.

"Right back to me when you're finished," he says, and I nod.

I walk away in search of the ladies' room. I didn't know how hard these heels were to walk in as I had Lucas to lean on for the night. It doesn't take long and I'm giving up my search because my feet hurt too much. When I spot a balcony nearby I start to walk out onto it.

"Did you see who Lucas brought?" I step back into the shadows at the mention of Lucas and rest up against the side of the building. I can see two beautiful blondes standing there smoking. "I thought his mom said he needed a wife? She's not wife material. She'd never make it." One of them drops her cigarette and smashes it with the heel of her shoe.

"It doesn't matter. Lucas's mom will get her out of here. We all know Lucas does everything for his family, and if she wants her gone she's gone. And then." I hear fingers snap. "One of us can slide right in. Iris has always liked me." They both laugh.

"Let's go see if she's gotten rid of her yet."

They walk inside, leaving me alone out on the balcony. I stand there, a swirl of emotions running through me. Of course the women are stupid and catty, but is there some truth to what they said? Will it always be like this? People wondering why he's with me?

I don't fit in here. I felt that when I was standing there with him and people were going on and on about stocks and investments. I was lost. The

only saving grace was just getting to be with Lucas and leaning into him. I enjoyed that part of the night. It felt so right being with him.

A lump forms in my throat. Things like this don't happen to girls like me. I know his mom is in there right now probably telling him he is crazy for jumping into this so soon. Heck, even I know it's crazy, yet I still want it so badly.

The women were right about one thing. He always does whatever he can for his family. If they don't like what's happening between us, they could end things for us. I swear I can actually feel my heart break at the thought.

"Ah, there's Lucas's mystery woman. I thought he was never going to let you go." A man in a suit steps out and strolls over towards me. He's got slicked back blond hair and an oily smile.

"You don't look his type." His dark eyes roam over me.

"What's his type?" I ask, wondering myself.

"He normally doesn't bring dates, but maybe he thought one might be a buffer for him. Looks like that plan is blowing up right in his face." He lets out a deep chuckle.

Is he insinuating that I'm just a fake date. God, this sucks. Today started off so wonderfully and now it feels like everything is slipping away. The real world has pushed in on the fairy tale.

I don't want to engage with a man I don't even know. "If you'll excuse me."

He grabs my arm and stops me from taking another step. I open my mouth to tell him to let go, but before I can, Lucas is there. His fist flies through the air and lands with a loud crack. I scream and jump back, almost falling over in my heels. But when I steady myself, Iris is there next to me.

"Maybe you should go," she says as Lucas grabs the man by his suit. "Inside. Go." Iris pushes me away from the scuffle. I glance over my shoulder and see Lucas isn't even looking my way. Maybe she's right. I should just go.

TEN

LUCAS

I see out of the corner of my eye Ava walking away and I just won't have that. Not now. Not ever. With another punch, the asshole who put his hands on her is on the ground and I'm going after her.

"Ava, wait!" I call out, and when she turns around I see she's got tears in her eyes.

"Oh no, petal, don't cry. I'm sorry if I scared you."

"It's not that. It's everything." She waves her hands around the room and I understand what she means.

"I broke a promise to you when I said we'd only stay ten minutes. I shouldn't have even come. You are so much more important to me than that. And I won't ever break another promise to you again."

"Is everything okay?" My mother comes over with tissues and holds them out for Ava.

"Thank you," Ava says and takes them from her.

"Don't worry about the makeup running. You're absolutely stunning no matter what," my mother says, and Ava pauses and sniffs.

"You think I'm pretty?" she asks, her voice unsure.

"Are you kidding me? When Lucas said you were one of Rebecca's models I expected you to be a cookie-cutter airhead like those tramps on the balcony. No, I could tell you we're different and I liked you from the moment I saw you two together. I asked you to leave because I knew my son wouldn't want you to see him like that. He'd want you out of harm's way." I have to bite back a smile at my mother calling someone a tramp. "But in walks my son with the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on. I hope my grandbabies have your hair and eyes. They're going to be so beautiful. Now,

you two aren't going to make me wait long before you get started, right? I'm not getting any younger, and I want at least four. Two girls and two boys."

"That's enough, Ma," I say and go to step between my mother and Ava. But to my surprise, Ava pushes past me and wraps her arm around my mom.

"I'm so happy," Ava says, and she sniffs again.

"I'm so happy, too," my mom says, and I can hear her whispering about having a wedding next weekend, so I pull Ava away.

"I'll call you tomorrow," I say to my mom as I hold Ava snug against me.

"I'll call the club. We can have it there. It will be perfect," my mother calls from behind us as we leave.

"I thought this was going to be a disaster," Ava says when we get outside.

My driver is there waiting with the door open, and I help her into the back.

"How could it be a disaster when it began so beautifully," I say as I get to my knees in front of her.

"Again?" she asks, her voice low but full of excitement.

"And again and again and again," I say as I kiss my way up her thighs. "Until my last breath."

"I never thought fairy tales came true," she says as she spreads her legs wider.

"Come closer, petal, and let me show you."

EPILOGUE

AVA

One year later...

I sit in the chair still tired from the night before. It has been a long flight and the makeup artist keeps giving me glares because I'm trying to eat while she's putting on my makeup, but she won't say anything. I'll just keep getting the looks.

"Trust me, if I don't eat my breakfast Lucas will be more trouble than we want to deal with." I hear Rebecca snort-laugh from behind me because it's the truth. It's our first morning in Fiji, having gotten in late last night. I missed breakfast because my husband decided he wanted to have me for breakfast, making me late to the shoot to begin with.

He hadn't been happy with my saying I'd wait until lunch to eat. I wasn't at the location of the photoshoot for more than five minutes, my ass had barely hit my chair, and eggs benedict was being delivered right to me. It's my weakness...well, my second behind my husband.

"Take ten," Lucas says as he comes strolling into the tent like he owns the place. I guess he kinda does, but unless it has to do with me, he doesn't interfere all that much.

He's dressed in casual khaki shorts and a soft white cotton shirt. Still somehow he looks like a billionaire that owns the world, even without one of his suits on.

"Take your ten, but that it's. The sun is an issue. Even you have no control over it," Rebecca reminds her brother. I fight a laugh at his face because I know the look. He's actually thinking of ways he could possibly control the sun.

“Ten is good, Rebecca,” I cut in before they go into one of their mini fights that can be rather adorable, but we don’t have time for one right now. She’s right. If we want a sunrise shoot we need to stick to the time schedule or we’ll be back here tomorrow morning cutting into Lucas’s and my plans for our second honeymoon.

When we landed here last night all the feelings from our wedding and honeymoon flooded me. I’d forgotten how much I love it here. It’s hard to believe it’s only been a year. I swear I’ve been with this man my whole life. It’s hard to think I lived without him.

Rebecca walks out of the tent and leaves us alone. It’s crazy how close she and I have become. We’re more like sisters now than two people who work together. I didn’t only get Lucas when we married, I’d gotten a family. I love them all. They didn’t bat an eye when Lucas rushed us to get married five seconds after we met.

Lucas puts his hands on either side of the tall chair I’m sitting in, caging me in. He leans down and kisses me deeply. You’d think I hadn’t seen him for days and his face hadn’t been between my legs not even an hour ago.

His hand slips into the thin white robe I have on and engulfs my breast. He groans into my mouth before pulling himself from me and fixing my robe. “I don’t like you sitting around in only a robe in public,” he growls as he picks up the container that has my breakfast in it. He brings a bite to my mouth. I part my lips for him and he feeds me.

“Bikini is white,” I tell him. They didn’t want to risk getting makeup on it. It’ll be the last thing I put on before we shoot.

“I’m glad you guys moved into swimsuits. They cover more,” he says as he brings another forkful to my mouth. I take it, knowing he hasn’t taken a look at the bathing suit line then. They cover about the same as some of the lingerie.

“Does it really matter?” I ask after swallowing my food. “You made sure the staff is all-female,” I say with a laugh. He lifts his hand and brushes something from my lips with his thumb. He brings it to his own mouth and licks it. I clench my thighs together, wondering if he did that on purpose to get me hot.

“The security isn’t,” he says with a grunt. I find his jealousy adorable. It probably has something to do with how I grew up. Having someone in my life that wants me all to himself makes me feel special. He makes me feel so much. I even love that grumpy look he has on his face right now. I don’t care

if I should like it. I do.

"I'm only yours," I remind him. "Only you have ever touched or seen the things underneath the things I wear."

"The only one that ever will," he adds.

"Kiss me," I tell him, knowing it will calm him. He does instantly. "I want to relive our honeymoon all over again when today is over." I dig my fingers into his shirt.

"Oh, we will. We won't be leaving that hut over the water all weekend unless it's for a swim." I smile up at him, loving this plan. Only him and me for a week straight. It's perfect. He's perfect.

It's been a wild last year. The company had exploded. Lucas was right. We put women of all shapes and sizes in the campaign and it sold like crazy. The press has been all over it. We can't keep the shelves stocked, and I'm so happy for Rebecca.

What's odd out of all of it is people recognizing me when I'm out and about. Lucas hasn't been too happy about that. If he isn't by my side then security is. He's sure someone will just snatch me away from him.

"Then let me get this shoot done and we can start our week together. I know you're itching to go check security now that you've ensured I've eaten." He smiles before leaning in and kissing me again. I let go of his shirt.

"Love you, petal," he says before slipping from the tent. Moments later everyone is back in action, getting me ready.

I wonder if I'll get pregnant during this honeymoon. I really thought I would have by now. It's not like we use protection. It's probably for the best with how busy we've been. Between this and wanting to spend every other moment we have together, maybe it was good I haven't gotten pregnant yet. We have time. I know one way or another we'll have a family. We should enjoy this time together.

When my makeup is done, I slip into the white bikini and pull my robe back on before walking out of the tent onto the beach where everything is set up and ready to go. I give my husband a wink, knowing I can't go over to him because he'll kiss me, and not only will his sister lose it but so will the makeup artist.

When I drop my robe, a string of curses leaves Lucas. "That's not a fucking bathing suit!" he shouts. Everyone ignores him. They're used to his comments by now. I felt out of place during my first few shoots but now modeling is as easy as breathing. There is something about feeling good in

your skin that I believe comes through in the pictures.

I glance over to Lucas a few times as I pose and move around. His arms are folded over his chest, his jaw tight, and I know he's going to fuck the shit out of me the moment he gets his hands on me.

He rides this razor-thin line of loving that everyone knows I'm his, that he's married to me, as if getting me to say "I do" was his greatest achievement. That's balanced with the side that has to remind himself that I'm only his, even if the world gets to see pictures of me like this. Fucking me like crazy tonight will be how he reconciles both sides as he commands me to tell him I belong to him over and over again.

I don't know why that always turns me on, but it does. Thinking about it now my body starts to heat. It knows what's to come. Something must show on my face, and Lucas reads me so easily. He's on me even as his sister yells at him to stop. He lifts me, swiftly throwing me over his shoulder. I don't fight him. I'm ready to go, too.

I hear Rebecca shout, "That's a wrap," as Lucas deposits me in the back of a limo. He's not only recreating our honeymoon, I realize. We're also reliving the time he took my virginity. He closes the window to shut the driver out from seeing us as he comes down on top of me, reminding me of the night I fell in love with him. Though I'm pretty sure I've loved him my whole life.

EPILOGUE

LUCAS

Three years later...

She walks into the kitchen with one of my button-up shirts on and I swear to god I've never seen her look sexier. The shirt is only buttoned at her breasts and the rest of it's open, exposing her round baby belly. She's getting bigger and bigger every day and I can't wait to meet our baby boy.

"I made you breakfast," I say as I put the toast and jam on the counter and grab the plate of eggs and bacon I made for her.

"What did I do to deserve such a wonderful man?" she asks and she comes over and kisses me.

I press my lips to hers and then lean down and kiss her belly. "Made a deal with the devil?" She laughs and shakes her head as I raise an eyebrow at her.

"We have to get a crib today. We can't wait any longer," she tells me while I butter her toast and she takes a seat at the bar.

"You act like I'm the one holding up that process," I say, and she smiles at me and shrugs.

"It's easier to blame you because I know you won't get mad."

"How could I ever be mad at you?" I walk around and kiss her neck as I take a seat beside her. "Why have you been putting it off for so long?"

She looks down at her breakfast and then back at me before she bites her lip. "I think I'm just scared. It took us so long to get pregnant in the first place. What if something goes wrong?"

"Shhh," I say as I pull her close and kiss the top of her head. "The doctor

PERIGOSAS

said everything is fine and that sometimes it takes people a while. You're healthy and so is our baby and that's all that matters."

"You're right. It's just delivery jitters, I suppose. It's coming so fast."

"I'm going to be right here with you the whole time," I say as I place my hand on her belly and kiss her lips.

"I feel like I can do anything with you beside me."

"Then I'm doing my job right," I say, picking up her toast. "Now eat something so I can lay you down on the couch and lick your pussy."

Her cheeks flush as she takes the toast from me and eats it in four bites. "All finished," she declares with her mouth full, and I shake my head and laugh.

"Grab the other one too," I say, and she snatches it off the plate. I lift her up and carry her into the living room.

She's only wearing my shirt, meaning I've got total access to her pussy, which is my mission in life. I lay her down on the chaise and kneel at the end of it as I spread her legs.

"Eat, petal," I say, and she takes a bite as I kiss the inside of her thigh.

My mouth trails up her soft skin until I reach her lower lips. They're pink and glistening with need. I run my tongue between them and taste her sweetness. I moan at her flavor, knowing that I'll never get enough of it. Each time is like the first time, and the moment her sweetness hits my lips I'm addicted.

"Lucas," she moans, spreading her legs wider.

Her pregnancy hormones are going crazy, so most days we just lie around the house naked and I get her off when she needs it. She's demanding, but I don't have a single complaint as I give her exactly what she wants.

I reach up and under the shirt to touch her sensitive nipples and gently pinch them. I dream about the day when they're filled with milk and I can taste just how sweet she is. They're already so full and tender, but she loves when I touch her there while I lick her pussy.

She's wet and soft as she rocks her hips and seeks out her orgasm. She's so quick to get off that I like to tease her a little, which drives her insane.

"Please don't make me beg," she whines, and I laugh against her.

"Isn't that what you're doing now?"

"Lucas!" she shouts as I tongue her clit rapidly and then slow down.

"It will be so much better if you wait," I say, and she whines again.

She knows I won't play with her for long but just enough to make it good

for her. I suck on her clit as I flick my tongue over and over until she cries out. Her body is flushed and she's trying to catch her breath as I glance over at the uneaten toast beside her.

I make a tscking sound as I move onto the chaise with her and position myself between her legs. "You didn't finish your breakfast."

"After, I swear," she says as she reaches down and grabs my cock to help guide it into her. "Please, Lucas, I need it."

My cock swells with her words and I can't deny her what she wants. I push the thick head of my dick into her and her warm wet folds tighten around me. It's always like the first time with her as I slide my length into her and she squeezes every inch of me.

"How does this sweet little pussy keep getting tighter?" I ask as I slowly pull out then rush to get back inside her. "I break it in and then you go and undo all that work I put in."

She laughs and then moans as she spreads her legs wider. I reach down and play with her clit, holding myself deep. This is her favorite way to cum and I love feeling it up and down my cock.

"It's okay, petal. I love how snug you are around me."

She grabs my arms and holds on to me as she moans loudly. Her hormones are so close to the surface these days that she gets off with just a few dirty words and a stroke of my thumb.

"I can't wait for you to make me a daddy," I say as I feel my own orgasm building at the base of my spine.

I lean down and run my tongue over her nipple, and her body shivers as she cries out again. When I suck on her warm pink skin, I feel myself leaking inside her. My cum is fighting its way out of me and I'm not strong enough to hold back any longer. I grunt on top of her, waves of pleasure rolling over me.

She's slick and sticky as my cum fills her up and begins to run out between us. Her body responds to mine, and she clamps down on me as another orgasm hits her.

"I can't...don't move." She pants to catch her breath and I try to hold myself still.

She begins to laugh and I do the same as I press my forehead to hers and gently kiss her lips. She's overstimulated and I know I need to give her break, but I can almost bet in ten minutes she's going to be on this couch once again.

“Better?” I ask, and she nods her head and smiles up at me. I slide out of her and then scoop her up in my arms, carrying her back to the kitchen. “Good. Now will you let me feed you?”

“I thought you just did.” She winks at me, and I spank her ass before I set her down in her seat.

“Oh, I’m going to put something in your mouth, but I’m waiting until after you’ve eaten your bacon.”

“Deal,” she says, and she picks it up and I lean down and kiss her neck.

Life before kids is pretty damn sweet, but I have a feeling in a few short weeks it’s going to get even better.

EPILOGUE

AVA

Another five years later...

I lean against the wall outside of our son's room as I listen to Lucas read him a bedtime story. He said he'd tuck him in while I'd once again checked over everything to make sure we were ready for tomorrow. I'm sure Lucas knows I'm out here. I've been a little bit clingy with our son for the past few weeks. Tomorrow's the big day. He starts kindergarten. He won't be spending his days with us anymore. The three of us had become this perfect little triad and now he's going off into the world without us.

I roll my watering eyes at myself, knowing I'm being ridiculous. It's only half days, but still. Next will be middle school, then high school and girlfriends and college. How did these past five years fly by so quickly? Lucas let me get away with being a little clingy until I started talking about homeschooling and found faults in every school that Lucas brought to the table.

I bite my lip and try not to laugh when I remember I said one school's gymnasium looked like its floors were over waxed and he could get hurt in PE. Lucas found it funny and laughed about it for days. I hadn't at the time. It wasn't until he told Ma and his sister the story that I'd actually laughed and could see I was being crazy. Even my son slipped into my lap tonight after dinner, laid his head on my shoulder and told me he'd miss me but he was ready for kindergarten. Then gave me a kiss on the cheek and promised to draw me something super cool at school tomorrow.

A few moments later Lucas steps from our son's room, his hand sliding right into mine as he guides me down the hallway to our bedroom and closes

the door behind us. "You okay, petal?" he asks, turning to look at me as he cups my face making me look up at him.

"Yeah, I don't know why I'm such a mess about this." Sigh. He kisses both my cheeks then my mouth. I close my eyes as he deepens the kiss for a moment. "It's because you're pregnant," he says against my mouth, kissing me again. I still, but he keeps on kissing me. My mind starts whirling. Am I pregnant? Is that possible? He lifts me off my feet. I wrap my arms and legs around him as he carries me into our bathroom, sitting me on the counter in the bathroom between the two sinks.

"How do you know?" I finally sputter out. Shouldn't I be the first one to figure that out? Though he did call it with our son. If anyone knows my body, it's him. He pays attention to every breath I take. He knows it better than I do.

He smiles as he pulls his shirt off over his head and tosses it away. "Is it a girl?" I ask. He laughs at that, and I glare at him. Last time he told me I was pregnant and that it was a boy. He was right on both counts.

"You said you wanted our next to be a girl." He shrugs as if he really controls this. Well, technically the man does, but not consciously or deliberately!

"Are you sure?" I hedge. Sometimes I really do think he's super human. He always does get what he wants. Luckily, what he wants is what I want, too, for the most part.

"Yeah, petal, I'm sure." Now he pulls my shirt off and tosses it away. "You haven't drunk your morning coffee in two weeks, you cried over a toilet paper commercial the other night and you've been waking me with your pussy already wrapped around my dick in the mornings. You're pregnant."

I have been extra horny. My last pregnancy was like that, too. He's usually the one who wakes me in the morning, with soft kisses that trail down my body until he makes me cum on his tongue before he's inside me. I didn't wake him with that sweetness and gentleness. I more attacked him, jumped him, really.

"That bear was so adorable," I defend. It was the cutest commercial I'd ever seen. He raises an eyebrow at me.

"I'm pregnant," I admit, smiling so big it hurts. "With a girl," I confirm. He throws his head back and laughs.

"God help me and Sam. If she looks like you we're going to have our hands full." He shakes his head thinking about it as he goes over to run the

bath. I place my hand over my belly, marked from when I carried our son Sam. I did some modeling while I was pregnant with him. They're some of my favorites from over the years. Lucas framed some, putting them throughout the house. After Sam came along, though, I stopped modeling. It's not that I didn't enjoy it anymore. I did. I even felt part of a women's movement for women out there to accept their bodies, but Sam started a new chapter in our lives.

This chapter is all about family to me—something I never had and I'm going to soak up every moment of being a mom. I'm lucky to have Lucas's Ma at my side, who's like a mom to me now, too. She helped me through the first few days when I was a little bit panicked that everything I was doing was wrong.

Lucas comes back over to me as the tub fills with water. "One of my favorite things about being pregnant was our nightly baths when you'd rub my feet." I sigh as he pulls me down from the counter before removing the rest of my clothes from my body.

"You don't have to be pregnant for me to do that for you, petal. I'll do that every night for the rest of our lives if you want." His hand grazes my belly.

"How do you think Sam will take it?" I ask as he leads me over to the tub and helps me step in.

"He'll be a good big brother." He steps in behind me. We sit so my back is to his chest for now.

"Yeah, he's a mini you and you're so good to your sister." I smile thinking about that.

Lucas roams my body with gentle hands. I lay my head back and enjoy the feel of him. I know what he's doing. Since he left our son's room he's been on a mission to calm me down. He always knows what to say and do to make me feel better.

The more I think about it, the more I settle into what is happening. I know Lucas will take care of everything. Every time something big comes our way and I have my Chicken Little moment, he's there to not only fix it but to make me laugh and tell me what I need to hear.

His hand slides between my thighs. I part them naturally. My body always craves his touch there. He lazily strokes me, building me closer to orgasm. It doesn't take long and I'm cumming from his touch. When my orgasm fades, he bites my neck.

“That was only a warm-up, petal. I’m not done with you yet,” he tells me as he lifts me from the bath and heads for our bed. Neither of us care that we’re wet. My back hits the bed and he comes over me. “I’ll never be done with you,” he adds, then kisses me. And I will never be done with him either. I want to be as close to him as I can get forever.

EPILOGUE

LUCAS

Eight years later...

“I don’t like this, petal,” I say as I feel her tug my hand.
“That’s only because you’re blindfolded,” she giggles, and I almost trip as I take another step towards her.

“Of course it is!”

“Come on, let me be in control one time.”

She asks so sweetly that I sigh and give in. We both know how this is going to end up, but I’m going to let her have her fun for now.

Suddenly I hear the door open and I can feel sunshine on my face.

“Okay, Ava, what the hell are you doing?” I say as she leads me into the back yard.

“Look, you’re always the one to be romantic. You’ve spent our entire relationship giving me what I want and making my dreams come true.”

“That’s my job,” I say quizzically. What else does she expect? “But if you don’t tell me what is going on I’m going to take this blindfold off.”

“You will not! I’ve spent months trying to plan this out and you are not about to ruin it.” Her grip tightens on my hand as we walk out into the grass.
“Just one more second.”

I sigh and try to be patient as she moves around behind me. I feel her finger undoing the knot at the back of my head and she tells me to keep my eyes closed. The material slips free and she moves back around to my front and I can almost hear how excited she is.

“Okay, open your eyes!” she shouts, and I do as I’m told.

“Ava, what did you do?” I say, my eyes widening in shock.

“Surprise!” She’s bouncing on her toes as she points to the hot-air balloon that’s parked in our backyard.

“How?” is all I can manage to say as the team of people all hold on to ropes to keep it in place.

“I called around. I wanted to do something big for you and it just kind of snowballed from there.” She twists her fingers together and looks nervous. “You don’t like it?”

The look in her eyes nearly breaks my heart and I force myself to smile as big as I can. I wrap my arms around her and scoop her up as I kiss her cheeks. “Of course I love it. This is the most romantic thing ever.”

I don’t mention that I’m terrified of heights and that I really hope we’re just going to look at it and not get inside. I can’t break her heart and it seems she’s got it set on this. She tugs my arm towards the basket and I realize we are indeed getting in it and lifting off the ground. I feel my heart racing, but for her I can do anything. So instead of keeping my feet planted I follow her into the basket below the giant balloon.

“Isn’t this amazing?” she asks excitedly as the operators come over and help us in and then lock it closed. “I’ve always thought this was just the most romantic thing ever.”

“Sure, I can see that,” I say, gripping the edge with sweaty hands as the people holding the ropes stand back.

“We’re going to be holding on to you guys the whole time, so enjoy your time and just radio us when you’re ready to come down.”

I glance behind me to see there’s a little bench in here, with a picnic basket and a walkie talkie on top of it. Oh god, this isn’t just a quick up and down, she wants to have lunch here.

“I packed all your favorites,” Ava says as she snuggles close to me. “I thought we could watch the sun set.”

“Isn’t that in, like, four hours?” I say, noting the sun still shining bright in the sky.

“I bet we can see all the way to your mom’s house. I know the kids would have loved this, but I thought it would be special with just the two of us.”

The balloon begins to lift us up and my heart starts to race. I keep telling myself to breathe and that this is for Ava. I can do this for her.

“Oh wow, isn’t it just beautiful.” I swallow as I feel a chill run down my back. “Lucas?” she says, and I realize I’ve closed my eyes. “Baby, are you okay? You look a little pale.”

“I’m good. I think I need to sit down.” I open my eyes to find the little seat and it’s then I realize we are up in the air and over our house. We can, in fact, see all the way to my mom’s and my stomach does a little flip.

“Here, let me help.” I hear her move the picnic basket out of the way and I take a seat. It’s better, but I can still see forever in front of us and my brain knows that I’m off the ground. “Baby, are you afraid of heights?”

I swallow hard and nod slightly as I squeeze her hand. “It’s fine, this is so romantic.” But even as I say the words I can hear myself forcing them.

For a second I’m terrified I’ve ruined her day, but when I look up I see her covering her mouth with her hand and her shoulders shaking.

“Are you laughing at me?” I say, my eyebrows pulling together.

Her face turns red as she shakes it, but then a bubble of laughter spills out of her. “I’m sorry, it’s not funny, but it kind of is.”

“How so?” I say defiantly.

“Because you’ve been my big strong protector this whole time but secretly you’re terrified of heights. And I wanted to do something big and romantic and I go and rent a hot-air balloon. The one thing you would absolutely hate. I mean, come on, Lucas. That’s pretty damn funny.”

I feel myself begin to smile as she slips into my lap and straddles me. Having her in my arms goes a long way to relax me, and when I feel her hand snake down between us and cup my cock, all thoughts of being in the sky are long gone.

“I think I know a way to get you over this fear,” she says as she pulls her dress up.

My cock is hard and ready as she undoes my jeans and takes me in her hand. Just a few quick pumps to tease me before she pulls her panties to the side and slides me into her wet folds.

Once I’m surrounded in her, there’s nothing and no one else. The rest of the world disappears and I’m narrowed to the feeling of her in my arms.

I tug down the front of her dress until her breast is free and I can suck on her nipple. She rolls her hips to ride me as I thrust into her from below. It’s hot and dirty and for some reason my fear and her seeing me vulnerable have turned us both on.

I’m desperate for her like I didn’t just fuck her hours ago in our shower. My cock is swelling and her pussy so soft and warm. She squeezes me tight as she grinds her clit onto me and I feel her body tense. She arches her back and just as she goes off, she takes me over the edge with her.

My cock empties inside her as she moans and pulses around me. The combined release coats me and spreads between us, and I sigh in contentment.

“I was right,” she says with a smug look on her face.

“You were.” I thrust my cock into her again and smile at her. “Now I just need you to do that for the next four hours and I’ll be totally fine.”

She laughs as she moves on me and leans in close. “Deal.”

“I love you,” I say, kissing her lips softly.

“I love you, too,” she answers as we float among the clouds and drift off into our forever.

THE END!

Curvy

The first time Flynn Long sees her, she's lying on a bed in lingerie. The picture is soft, just like her curves, and instantly he's obsessed.

Cali Carr is at the end of her full-figure modeling career when she's hired for a new campaign. But when the owner of the company steps out of the shadows and starts calling the shots, a job is the last thing it feels like.

Love at first sight isn't supposed to be real. One touch isn't supposed to ignite so much. A single picture isn't supposed to drive a man insane. But luckily for us it's happening in Curvy!

Warning: Over the top isn't strong enough for what this short story is. It's velvety sweetness coated in insta-love cheese, and it's waiting for you to take a bite.



CHAPTER 1

FLYNN

“**Y**ou told me you had this under control. That was the only reason I agreed to invest in a women’s lingerie line.”

I look down at the sales charts of Curved Intimates, a company we invested in over six months ago. It’s bleeding money, and I’m close to just scrapping the whole project and being done with the headache. I have enough on my plate as it is.

When you invest in as many things as Breakstone Corp does, you can’t be surprised when not all of them work out. But I had agreed with Mark when he brought this proposal to me. It was supposed to be the next Victoria’s Secret. The pitch was good and the women’s market wasn’t one we had worked our way into yet. Mark said it was something he really wanted to take on, so we went for it.

I know shit about fashion. I pay someone to shop for me and pick out my clothes. I know even less about women’s undergarments. Fuck, I can’t even remember the last time I saw a real woman in her underwear.

I run my hands over my face, trying to relieve some of the tension headache that’s starting to build. It’s already six o’clock and it looks like I’m going to be here another four hours at least.

“Lynn from marketing is waiting outside. She seems to think she’s come up with something.” Mark shifts uncomfortably, probably scared I’m going to fire him. But this is the first time he’s ever missed the mark like this before. He’s eager and good at his job, but if I had a wife and three kids, I’d probably worry if I fucked up, too. You can’t win them all, and I can’t fault him for wanting to try to branch us out to something new. It showed enthusiasm, and it’s the very reason I’d hired him

I flip through the last marketing ads in the folder again. They look standard, but there's nothing special about the pictures, nothing that draws attention. They look like every other ad for women's underwear you've ever seen. There's no clear branding and nothing that stands out about this line.

"I hope it's better than this shit." I toss the folder back across the desk at him.

"I've been working with marketing. They have a few ideas I really like and—"

I cut him off. I want to get this show on the road. "Mark, calm down. I'm not going to fire you over this. We'll hear marketing's ideas, and we either do them or we drop the whole fucking thing."

Mark nods before heading over towards the door, letting Lynn into my office. She shuffles over to my desk clutching a pile of binders so high I can't even see her face. The stack almost looks bigger than her. I'm not sure how she's made it all the way up here with them.

"Sir, can I get you or anyone else a drink?" Sally, my assistant, asks as she stands in the doorway to my office. I know the only reason she's offering is because other people are in here. She stopped getting me my coffee years ago, telling me she didn't have a degree in business so she could waste it on fetching coffee. She's an expensive pain in the ass I couldn't live without. Luckily for me, her kids are off in college and her husband doesn't seem to mind the long hours I often need her to work. I have a feeling she's made me dependent on her on purpose. There's no way I could fire her or her smart mouth.

"I'm good, Sally." I look to Lynn and Mark, who both say, "No, thanks," before Lynn goes back to trying to get her binders in the order she likes. One falls off the top, landing open, making my whole body go still at the image.

The woman in the photo is lying on a bed, her legs in the air and crossed at the ankles. She has on fishnet stockings that lead up her legs to her thick thighs. She's wearing high-waisted black underwear that shows off her wide hips, giving her an old-school pinup feel, and a sexy bra that barely contains her full breasts, the material just covering the essentials. Every part of her is thick and luscious. All the blood in my body flows to my dick. I've never had a reaction like this to a woman. I'm too old to get a fucking hard-on from seeing a woman in a picture. She's not even naked. Just the sight of her in her underwear has me nearly bursting in my slacks.

I see Mark out of the corner of my eye as he takes a step towards my desk

to see what's caught my attention. I slam the binder closed, not wanting him to see her. Possessiveness flows through me, and I look at Lynn, who's still going through the binders. When I look at Mark, he has his eyebrows raised in question.

I pick the binder up and open it to show Lynn. When Mark takes another step to see what I'm showing her, I can't hold back.

"Don't," I bite out, making him pause, the confusion on his face growing. "Who is this?" I demand, needing more information on her. Anything.

"Oh. Just an idea I was thinking about. Going a little old school with some of the looks and appealing to all body types."

"Her name?" I push, and she reaches for the binder. I pull it back, not wanting it taken from me. Almost like a toddler with his favorite toy.

"If you flip a few pages, it should be in the front. Before her pictures start," she says, seeing that I'm not going to give her back the binder.

I turn the book around to me and hurriedly flip through the pages until I get to the front.

Cali Carr.

Measurements: 40"/32"/48" (Bust/Waist/Hips)

Dress size: 14 Shoe Size: 8

I turn the page, hoping there's another picture of her. The one on the bed made it hard to see her face. I flip to the next page, and I literally have to sit down in my chair. She's smirking in the picture. Her full lips are just as lush as the rest of her. Her skin is flawless, a creamy white making the little freckles that sprinkle her upturned button nose even more noticeable.

But what really gets me are her stunning eyes. They're a deep green like nothing I've never seen before. In contrast with her red hair, they are unmissable.

"Sir," I hear Lynn say, and I look up at her. I have no idea how long I've been staring at the picture.

"I want her."

"Okay. I'll put her on the list. I have a few more for you to look at."

She tries to hand me another binder, but I have no desire to look at pictures of other women. What would be the point? They'd all pale in comparison. I've just seen perfection and I know nothing could beat it.

"No. I'll leave it to you and Mark to handpick the rest of the girls for the shoot." I stand up from my chair.

"Or course, sir. We'll get it all worked out."

“The shoot will be next week,” I tell them. I want to see her as soon as possible.

“I don’t think—”

“It will be next weekend. If the model’s photographer or something can’t make it, book someone else. But she,” I hold up the binder with her picture in it, “better be there. I don’t care what it costs.”

Standing up, I hold the binder in front of my crotch to hide my erection. I click the intercom.

“Sally, can you call my driver? I’m going down,” I inform her.

“Leaving already?” I can hear the shock in her voice.

“Yes.” I release the button. “Feel free to use my office until you’re done. I’ll see you tomorrow, Mark.” I head for the door with the binder still in front of me, hiding my very prominent arousal. I stop before I exit. “Send me any and all information you have on her, Lynn.”

“You’ll have it this evening,” she says, looking at me with big eyes.

I nod before exiting my office. I had better things to do tonight than spend it in my office. I have a binder half-full of pictures of my Cali.

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